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Department of State **TELEGRAM**

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CONFIDENTIAL 239

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AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH
AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SAIGON 9723

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

SUBJ: VICE PRESIDENT KY SPEAKS TO SOUTHERN VNQDD

REF: SAIGON 7526 Pol 14 Viet S

1. SUMMARY: VICE PRESIDENT KY AGAIN PUBLICLY AND HARSHLY CRITICIZED PRESIDENT THIEU AT SOUTHERN VNQDD MEETING. END SUMMARY

2. CHOLON CHAPTER OF SOUTHERN VNQDD HELD CEREMONY JUNE 17 TO COMMEMORATE THE 41ST ANNIVERSARY OF FRENCH EXECUTION OF VNQDD LEADERS OF YEN BAY INCIDENT. CEREMONY WAS ALSO RE-SCHEDULING OF MEETING ABORTED MAY 12 (SEE REFTEL). VICE PRESIDENT KY WAS AGAIN INVITED, AND THIS TIME THE MEETING PROCEEDED WITHOUT INTERFERENCE.

3. KY DELIVERED HARD-HITTING SPEECH ATTACKING THIEU, THOUGH HE DID NOT MENTION PRESIDENT BY NAME. CLAIMING THAT COUNTRY IS NOW RULED BY A DICTATORIAL AND CORRUPT MINORITY, HE CALLED FOR A SOCIAL REVOLUTION TO STRENGTHEN THE COUNTRY AND DEFEAT COMMUNISM. HE URGED THE PEOPLE

(1)

DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR
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SAIGON 9723 6/18/71

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TO APPRAISE THE SOCIETY HONESTLY AND CHOOSE RIGHTEOUS LEADERS WHO ARE TRUE PATRIOTS, REMINDING HIS LISTENERS THAT THE U.S. WILL SOON WITHDRAW AND "WILL NOT LIFT EVEN ITS LITTLE FINGER TO PROTECT OR SUPPORT US" IF SOUTH VIETNAM FALTERS IN THE FACE OF COMMUNIST PRESSURE.

4. REPLYING TO NEWSMEN'S QUESTIONS AFTER CEREMONY, KY STOPPED JUST SHORT OF EXPLICITLY ANNOUNCING CANDIDACY FOR PRESIDENT, DENIED HE WOULD RUN WITH GENERAL MINH, AND MADE SOME DIGS AT U.S.

5. REPORTEDLY, THIRTEEN NEWSPAPER CONFISCATIONS ON JUNE 18 WERE DUE TO THEIR CARRYING ARTICLES ON KY'S SPEECH.
HITCHCOCK

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ORIGI / ACTION

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S/S 10	PM 2	SY 1
AGR	COM	FRB
INT	LAB	TAR
TR	XMB	AIR 5
ARMY 3	CIA 16	NAVY 5
OSD 34	USIA 10	NSA 3
	FBI 1	NSC 6

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

AIRGRAM

17

Pol 14 Viets (1461)

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A-86 NO.

CONFIDENTIAL

XR Pol 12 Viets

HANDLING INDICATOR

TO : Department of State

Action

Action Taken

FROM : Amembassy SAIGON

DATE: June 19, 1971

Date of Action

SUBJECT : Tran Van Don and his Speech at National Salvation Party Congress May 22

Action Officer

Memo of Officer

REF : Saigon 8689

1971 JUN 25 PM 2 DEPARTMENT OF STATE

SUMMARY OF SPEECH

1. In a speech (Attachment A) delivered at the third annual convention of his National Salvation Front (NSF), former Senator Tran Van Don appealed for national solidarity and proposed a conference of generals (retired and active) to preserve army unity by fixing a common policy on the elections. Belittling the differences between the three leading candidates, he also announced that his party, the NSF, would stand aside from the candidacies of President Thieu and General Big Minh in the forthcoming presidential election, which he predicted would be honestly conducted. Although Don asserted that President Thieu lacks popular support and criticized his policy as inflexible, he nevertheless concluded that Thieu "surely" will win re-election and noted for the record that the NSF might even change its opposition to the President in the event he were more cooperative. In contrast Don commented that Minh enjoys popularity, but he pointedly declined to support the General on patently thin reasoning -- the need to protect the General's image.

2. In accord with earlier reports that he was moving closer to Vice President Ky, Don did not exclude the possibility of support for Ky's presidential campaign. Although recalling his earlier support and friendship for Ky, Don nevertheless refrained from an open endorsement. Don warned that the Thieu-Ky split benefits only the people's enemies and that an electoral dispute would lead to the army's disintegration, and further weaken the government.

Attachments: A. Don Speech, May 22
B. Don-Sylvester MemCon, June 1, 1971

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Drafted by: POL:AAdams:sfh 6/11/71

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Clearances: POL:JSylvester

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3. In standard comments on the war Don deplored the continuing fighting in Viet-Nam and noted that in this conflict "there are no winners or losers." He also expressed fears that the United States in the future might be unable to provide the requisite amount of assistance in Viet-Nam and called for a Vietnamization of the peace as well as of the fighting.

4. Comment: Don's remarks, characteristically tortuous, suggest a personal preference for Ky but also a healthy reluctance to support the Vice President in the face of Thieu's likely victory and the divisive consequences of a Thieu-Ky race

5. Don's rather abrupt treatment of Minh disappointed the General's followers who probably had hoped that Don would at least keep silent his chagrin with Minh's reserve towards him. In this regard Don himself has told us that about 70 convention delegates (out of a total of 250) -- including former lady Senator Nguyen Phuoc Dai and Senator Hong Son Dong -- met with Minh following his speech to express their anger with Don's statement of party position which, they contend, was unauthorized.

6. Don and others have confirmed to Embassy officers that Minh was irritated by his speech and on May 29 called a meeting of retired generals to isolate him and obtain the Generals' support for his presidential candidacy. According to several participants, most Generals agreed to back Minh for the presidency but ultimately decided that a public endorsement would be premature at the present time (Saigon 8689). According to one participant, Senator Ton That Dinh, Don stood by his declaration of neutrality of May 22 but eventually qualified his position "as a political tactic necessitated by internal party divisions" and he reportedly promised to review it at a later date.

7. Minh's apparent loss -- at least for the time being -- of Don's support is hardly fatal. Theatrics aside, Don remains a relatively uninfluential political figure and his party, the NSF, has so far been unable to raise itself from its present status as a minor group. Initially Don's personal instrument, the party is today divided between supporters of Vice President Ky and Big Minh, with the latter probably in the majority. Popular opinion, even in oppositionist areas such as MR I and Saigon, remains largely indifferent to the NSF, and Don himself has admitted that he is probably its only enthusiastic member (Attachment B).

8. Don, always the opportunist but colorful loner, nevertheless continues his effort on behalf of a host of quixotic political enterprises. In addition to the NSF, the list includes efforts to reconcile the leading

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presidential candidates, particularly Minh and Ky; a conference of all active and retired generals to establish a common electoral policy for the armed forces; an ambitious project to form an independent majority block of 80 Lower House deputies following the August elections; his own purported candidacy for the National Assembly; a non-starting Front to Defend Democracy to assure honest elections; and lastly the largely inactive Freedom Fighters Association.

9. With the exception of Don's possible Lower House candidacy, none of these projects is likely to succeed. Rather, their primary purpose appears to be promotion of Don's own political fortunes. His efforts, however, appear to have had a contrary effect, for most observers now discount Don's influence as overrated and note that his high velocity maneuvers have succeeded principally in arousing distrust.

10. Don, however, appears undaunted and doubtless believes that his speech of May 22 will assist in his apparently never-ending quest for high office. In his speech before the NSF Don managed by careful hedging to say nothing while appearing to be saying something. As his comments to the retired generals indicate, his speech is a characteristic political tactic which forecloses no options while freeing him to support any or none of the candidates.

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Attachment A
Saigon A-86

A.

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FREE TRANSLATION

New Conjuncture, New Obligations

ADDRESS BY GENERAL TRAN VAN DON, ret.
CHAIRMAN, NSF CENTRAL COMMITTEE TO THE 3rd
NATIONAL CONVENTION, NATIONAL SALVATION FRONT

May 21, 22, 23, 1971, in SAIGON

A correct assessment of the situation will entail a formulation of correct policies; that is the reason why all of us coming from all parts of the nation are gathering here today to make a thorough appraisal of the new situation prior to embarking upon a new course of action.

When we met here last May South Vietnam was stirred up by the rumbling protest of students and disabled veterans, the economic and financial marasmus, and the aftermath of the massacre of Vietnamese residents in Kampuchea. How significant these developments might have been, they were superseded by the recent Senate political line-up, the Laotian incursion controversy, the ominous prospects for the forthcoming elections and the thaw in the US-Red China relations.

There is indeed no let-up in the war. And the hoped for decrease in intensity is unfortunately no match for an increase in human sacrifices. Last year, the shedding of Vietnamese blood was limited to Vietnam and only to the fringes of Cambodia, it has expanded this year into land-locked Laos. During this time, and more than any time, all belligerent parties, the Free World with its RVN, the Socialist camp with its DRV and NLF, are boasting of victories...

In reality, neither side has won victory or suffered defeat. Only the fatherland of Vietnam is the loser, because the majority of the Vietnamese people who are longing for peace, freedom, and social justice, are suffering on both sides of the country. Communist North Vietnam has been ploughed up by bombing, ton of thousands elite youth have been lured to death for the so-called "Liberation" label while anti communist South Vietnam is exhausted be[illegible] of the shooting and killing even though this illogical ki[illegible]ng has been continued for a quarter of a century. Just in South Vietnam, there is no family which does not lose either its members or properties because of the war. If the war goes on, the day will come when out of 17 million Vietnamese there will be only old people, widows, orphans and disabled youth. Consequently, we the Vietnamese have to wake ourselves up to claim for the right of self-determination.

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In principle, both sides the Non-Communist and the Communist have recognized that self-determination is the basic condition of peace, but in fact, both sides have come to Paris not for the respect and the implementation of the principle of self-determination. The negotiation deadlock has the hope of a break through only if either side wins the political and military upper hand or at least the people's support. And the American policy of Vietnamization is a policy to win the people's support for the Saigon government.

In our bulletin of May, 5, 1970 we had the following analysis :

"The plan of the Vietnamization of the war is one of the results of the Paris conference. The officials in Washington as well as in Saigon usually consider Vietnamization as a perfect solution toward ending the war. But, the truth is not so simple, the truth is that in Paris, the communist side has refused to talk with the Saigon government, and that the Americans hope the plan of Vietnamization will make the Communist change his attitude".

As we have realized that up today, the communist side has not changed its attitude yet.

Almost two years ago, our comrades in the Front and in the Armed Forces had delegated me the honour to present our view of the situation on the occasion of the celebration of November 1, 63 Day. In my speech dated October 30, 1969 delivered in Saigon, I raised four questions concerning the Vietnamization. They were : "What is the timetable of US troops withdrawal? Will the USAleave behind all military weapons and equipments for us or not? Will the USA continue in the future to give us weapons and financial support or not? How large will be this support and for how long?"

At that time, we did not have enough facts to answer these questions. But today, after 18 months have passed, the reality is looming and this fractional part of reality is enough to make us worry.

Even though the timetable of US troops withdrawal has not been announced yet, everybody can tell that the coming US presidential election will be the deadline of the withdrawal. In fact, our armed forces have been taking over almost all combat responsibities. Heavy military equipments and a great amount of modern equipments considered as the most powerful military means of pressure are expected to be withdrawn. Even though in the future the USA will continue the support,

.../3

this support will be smaller and smaller, and the conditions attached to it bigger and bigger. And this small scale aid will not be able to help us to play our new role in the whole Indochinese peninsula to face an ennemy who has received adequate foreign aids, and he does not have the problems of recruiting replacements and implementing democracy, that means the problems which have the character of life or death for South Vietnam.

Which worries us the most is that we do not know for how long this dwindling US support will be maintained. The US presidential term will expire at the end of 1972, and the American internal situation may have a big influence on the scale and time limit of the US foreign aid. That is not to take into account sudden changes of situation which may happen before then if the Communist side decides to make a shrewd tactical retreat on the subject of American prisoners of war.

The reason why the Vietnamization program has not created the results as expected is that it takes the wrong path right at the beginning. The Vietnamization program is not a gimmick to turn over the responsibility in order to get rid of it. The Vietnamization of the war should go hand in hand with the Vietnamization of peace. The Vietnamization is, semantics aside, a kind of US unilateral disengagement to which we should logically respond by a new look in VN foreign policy.

Whether we like it or not, the fact remains that all the sericus shortcomings of the Vietnamization doctrine still exist, that the enemy still exists, and we cannot adopt a complacent or indifferent attitude. We have to work hard to obtain the support of the people, with our own efforts and by our own means. This popular support can be obtained through the Congressional presidential elections, to be held this year. We have to be aware, however, that the position of stregth we are now trying to secure in order to help the negotiation talks proceed to a successful end, may very well become a position of weakness for us, if the two coming elections are not to be held on a special basis, the basis national unity.

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My dear friends,

When talking about elections, it is common for people to talk about "free elections", "democratic elections", or "honest elections", or "not rigged elections". I purposely avoid the use of these words because I personnally believe that the kind of "democracy" of an under-developped country, of a country which has been and still is subject to aggression coming from all sides, like our country, is not the same kind of democracy now existing in the western nations. I also believe that the kind of "un-conventional war" that we are now enduring cannot be solved by "conventional efforts".

I am certain that the coming elections will not be "rigged elections". The candidacy of Vice-President Ky, if and when he decides to run, the control exerted widely all over the country by the opposition, the steady and meticulous surveillance by international groups, all these factors will constitute effective barriers to keep the elections from being rigged. I also believe that President Thieu will personally see to it that the elections will not be rigged.

"Not rigged elections", however, do not mean elections in which everybody will have the same amount of falicities. The Constitution and the election laws can guarantee honesty but not equality of falicities. Although the election laws have not been promulgated, although voters have not cast their ballots, we might know now what will be the results of the elections. I have made in the past months many fact-finding trips to the countryside, to far-away villages and hamlets, and even to distant islands, to places where security is not very good, even to places where security has been lost, and I have talked at length and in all frankness with the military and administrative officials in these places. My efforts to get a true picture of the situation have convinced me that in the present circumstances President Thieu has the best chance to be reelected because our present constitution has allowed him to have a good control of these essential factors to be elected :

1.- The administrative, military, police and intelligence apparatus.

2.- The mass-media such as Radio, TV, and Press.

3.- A large financial potential.

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The control of only one of the three factors would be more than sufficient to help President Thieu get elected. And President Thieu now has all three under this control. President Thieu also has control of a fourth factor which is, although of a more abstract nature, not less decisive than the three others.

The fourth factor is the support given him* by the super-power of the United States of America.

We have to be honest with ourselves to admit that the US still has a very strong influence on our country. And we have to wait for a long time to come to see that this influence fades away. It is therefore not realistic to talk about elections without mentioning the factor of the US.

The Americans have repeatedly stated that they do not interfere with our presidential elections, and they have solemnly pledged to support any Vietnamese candidate chosen by the Vietnamese people. We believe in what the Americans said. However, on the other hand, we have the right to ask ourselves the question why the Americans have had such a neutral attitude, because, more than anyone else in this country, they know that given the present situation President Thieu is the one to have the best chance to be re-elected. I may be criticized for my opinion, however, I persist in my belief that given the present situation only the Americans are in a position to influence in any way that they might chose the outcome of the presidential elections, either for or against President Thieu.**

Some American officials used to say "it is true that President Thieu has all sorts of falicities or funds that no other candidate could match, but President Thieu does not have the right to coerce the voters into voting for him, and therefore, the ballots of the voters still are the ultimate factors to decide about the outcome of the elections".

This is a most rational argument,*** and yet one has to be a Vietnamese who has lived through 25 years of war to understand the full power of a chief of province, of a chief of police, or of a chief of district. During the last 7 years, every time that some political changes brought about the removal of a chief of province, then it is a

* IS THE SUPPORT OF THE US SUPERPOWER.

** ONE, BECAUSE ... IS IN A POSITION TO ... (illegible)

*** ... ARGUMENT ... (illegible)

foregone conclusion that the chief of district will not be able to remain as such after that. For the last seven years, anytime that a new director general of police takes over, then a number of provincial and district police chiefs, and even secret agents, are to be changed. The majority of the chiefs of provinces, of directors of police, of chiefs of districts, of police chiefs of districts, have been appointed by President Thieu. To be grateful to the Chief who has appointed you is only a natural thing, and thus, it is difficult for all these government officials to maintain an "objective" attitude. Moreover, the re-election of President Thieu also means the personal victory of these government officials, since the removal of the leader might bring about the removal of these officials.

The official electoral season has not begun so we do not know for certain how many candidates will decide to run. In addition to President Thieu, the two most often mentioned* names have been the ones of Vice-President Nguyen Cao Ky and General Duong Van Minh (Big Minh).

If personal loyalty is a determining factor I might have** backed Vice-President Ky. In this world of often shifted loyalty and gratitude, I am proud to say that it is not easy to find a friend such as Vice-President Ky. Vice-President Ky has left his position of President/Government more than three years ago, but he still commands support. To run for an election is just like to engage oneself in a free-for-all game of wrestling because any trick is considered good enough to elminate your opponent. This is why I am afraid that this free-for-all game of wrestling between the two generals who have been working together since 1965 to provide leadership for our country, will degenerate into a conflict favorable only for our enemy. The Armed Forces are the last citadel of our nation, and this last fortress has been weakened after each purge has taken place, from the coups of 1960, 1962, of November Ist 1963, then a series of coups and counter-coups since then, and also of 1966 the series of upheavals in Central Vietnam, and this is why I am afraid that the coming conflict for power, followed by a series of purges** will further weaken the armed forces.

The personal relationship between General Minh and I, has gone into history as a sort of landmark. We had worked together during the events of November Ist 1963. However, I have decided to stay aside of the electoral campaign of General Minh, if and when he decides to run as a presidential candidate, because I do not want to see the respected image of our elder brother in the armed forces to be involved in the whirlwind of political disunity.

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*AND MOST [illegible] SUPPORTED NAMES ARE

**[illegible] BACKED [illegible]

***[illegible] POWER STRUGGLE [illegible]

If all the three candidates Thieu, Ky and Minh will decide to run against each other, under different platforms, this is not in itself an indication of disunity. But the fact is that they are all against a coalition government, they are all for greater national unity, and social revolution, and for a free election in which the other side will be accepted to participate. When addressing the public, each one speaks in his own particular way, but their different opinions are only of a tactical nature. Moreover, because of each one's official position, Vice-President Ky cannot speak the same way that President Thieu does, the same way that General Minh cannot say what President Thieu or Vice-President Ky do.

President Thieu has "power", but no "popularity". Others might have "popularity" but no "power". The one who has "power" is able to keep the land. But only the one who has "popularity" will be able to win over "the mind and the heart" of the people. "Power" and "popularity" both are necessary factors for anyone who wants to "save the Fatherland" and "build the nation".

This is the major reason why our "National Salvation Front" should refrain from taking part in the electoral campaign of President Thieu.

This reserved attitude is not a consequence of the Second Convention held last year, during which we had decided to oppose the government.

In democracy the position of loyal opposition is necessary to maintain political balance. We are in opposition because we have come to the conclusion that President Thieu's policy is not flexible enough to deal with the present situation, and more important than that not open-minded enough to blend in harmony with other nationalist groups, from the centrist groups to the radical ones.

Our "opposition" to the government is one of "constructive opposition", as it has been made clear in the resolutions adopted by our Second Congress. And more than once, in the name of the Front, I have stated that we shall respond accordingly if President Thieu re-considers his policy for the sake of greater national unity.

One of the most important defects of the nationalist groups is the existence of too much self-pride and unjustified mutual distrust.

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* THE FOUR CANDIDATES HAVE ...

** " DOES NOT TAKE PART ..."

I have not hesitated to make the first step towards abolishing self-pride and mutual distrust. One such case happened in my decleration of November Ist, 1970. I also decided to withdraw from the Senate race last year, in order to have more time for my own project to understand better President Thieu, Vice-President Ky and General Minh. I also made many trips all over the country to lay the foundation work for national reconciliation.

If such a work of reconciliation fails, then I am afraid that the coming elections this fall will no longer offer the opportunity for all of us to win over popular support. On the contrary, the presidential election will only offer a tragic opportunity for the generals and the national militants to fight against each other. The government brought about by the coming elections will be weaker than the present one. And even if we are going to make more concessions, to the utmost, to the enemy, the latter will continue the war. And the most chaotic upheavals, heretofore unseen, will happen...

Such a gloomy perspective leaves us no other alternative than the one to achieve at all cost national unity, but prior to all this, the armed forces must set an example by getting united among themselves. If the Armed Forces can not be united, then no other national groups in South Vietnam will have the slightest hope to be united.

Many of the combatants, in and out of the armed forces, believe that the most appropriate solution is to convene a Generals' Convention. The Armed Forces are not an elected collectivity, however, the generals' convention migh have some partial representative nature if it is composed of both generals now in active service and generals who are no longer in active service. This generals'convention will decide on a definite line for the entire armed forces before the presidential elections are to take place.

My dear friends,

This suggestion might very well be considered as un-constitutional, but, my dear friends, what is a constitution if not the will of the people, in which the armed forces are the elements which have made the most sacrifices.

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On June 20, 1969, at Danang, I had made the following statement to the NSF Regional Convention for Central Vietnam :

We have only one way to progress, namely to consilidate from within, and to prepare for the time when we have to struggle peacefully with the enemy. To consolidate from within means to set up a broadly-based government composed of all nationalist tendencies and especially the progressist ones having the capacities and prestige to win over the enemy in the negotiations talks. To prepare for the peaceful struggle with the enemy means to get ready our nationalist candidates and to help them get more votes than enemy candidates.

With my most sincere wishes, I have the honor to conclude this report on "New Conjunctures and New Obligations".

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

PARTICIPANTS: Former Senator Tran Van Don, Chairman of the National Salvation Front
John Sylvester, Jr., First Secretary of Embassy
Alvin Adams, Second Secretary of Embassy

PLACE: Mr. Sylvester's residence for luncheon

DATE: June 1, 1971

SUBJECTS: Presidential Elections; General Minh's Campaign; Lower House Elections; The National Salvation Front.

1. SUMMARY:

-- President Thieu will certainly be reelected in October in technically honest elections.

-- Don confirmed that he is closer to Vice President Ky than to either President Thieu or General Minh, but insisted that he is not supporting Ky's would-be presidential candidacy.

-- Don also confirmed that, having failed in his efforts to reconcile Thieu and Big Minh, he is now attempting to arrange a compromise between General Big Minh and Vice President Ky.

-- Don stated that he had rejected an offer from Big Minh to serve as his campaign manager because Minh has refused to change his "ineffectual" working style.

-- General Minh was "shocked" at Don's recent statement of non-support and called an inconclusive conference of retired generals to isolate him by obtaining the support of their former comrades-in-arms.

-- Don stated that he is attempting to build an alliance of Lower House candidates which would then form an independent majority bloc of approximately 80 Deputies following the Lower House elections now scheduled for August.

-- Don acknowledged that his own party, the National Salvation Front, has apparently made little progress in expanding its membership and strengthening its cadre structure.

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Presidential Elections

2. Thieu's Candidacy. General Don restated his prediction of May 22 that President Thieu would certainly be reelected in the forthcoming presidential elections now scheduled for October 1971. In this regard Don emphasized Thieu's control of the state's military and civil service apparatus, his superior financial resources, and his control of the communication media. Don nevertheless believes that the presidential elections will be at least technically honest, emphasizing that Thieu would "not change ballot boxes." Don, however, did not exclude the possibility that the President would "exploit" his advantages as the incumbent to create difficulties for other presidential and opposition Lower House candidates. In this regard, Don strongly suspects that General Dang Van Quang, Special Assistant to the President for Security and Military Affairs, is probably deeply involved in the recent arrest of "vocal" oppositionist Ngo Cong Duc in Vinh Binh Province.

3. Asked to comment upon Thieu's possibilities for a vice presidential candidate, Don indicated that Prime Minister Tran Thien Khien now appears as the most likely choice. In this regard Don excluded the possibilities of a vice presidential candidacy for both CVT Chairman Tran Quoc Buu and former Prime Minister Tran Van Huong. Don belittled Buu's prospects on the grounds that he is a Catholic from central Vietnam who is not well known or particularly liked, even amongst his own labor colleagues. He also remarked that former Prime Minister Huong has now lost much of his former prestige -- even in Saigon -- due to "his failure to succeed as Prime Minister on two occasions."

4. Big Minh's Candidacy. In accord with his May 22 statement of non-support for Big Minh's candidacy, Don stated that General Minh "can accomplish nothing unless he changes his style of working." In this regard Don revealed that he had rejected an offer from General Minh to serve as his over-all campaign manager because Minh had apparently refused to act on Don's advice with respect to building a more professional campaign organization. In any event, Don continued, "Minh does not really have a chance against President Thieu."

5. Don stated that General Minh had been "shocked" at Don's recent statement of non-support and in reaction had called a conference of retired generals on May 29 to isolate Don by obtaining the presumed support of their comardes-in-arms. Don added that the participants had failed to agree on the principle of whether Minh should run or not but planned another conference to discuss the matter further without Minh's

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presence. According to General Don this inconclusive session continued for over 5 hours during which a heated debate ensued and a number of generals attempted to elicit from General Minh clarification of his position on various issues. Don stated that, in response to the questioning, General Minh had emphatically rejected any possibility of a coalition government with the Communists or of a neutral government for South Vietnam. Minh also acknowledged that fighting would have to continue in the event that the enemy does not compromise at the Paris negotiations but restated his support for a "live and let live" policy towards North Vietnam which calls for a withdrawal of all North Vietnamese forces and the continued separate existence of a North and South Vietnam. Notwithstanding Minh's clarifications, Don indicated that some of the participants refused to sign a statement which supported the principle of a Minh candidacy.

6. Commenting on Big Minh's campaign staff, General Don stated that Minh's current problem is that "he has too many advisors now, whereas before he had too few." In this regard Don identified the following personages as participating in General Big Minh's campaign staff: Buddhist Senators Vu Van Mau, Tran Quang Thuan, and Bui Tuong Huan; various members of the opposition Lower House Society Bloc, including Ngo Cong Duc, Ho Van Minh, Bloc leader Phan Thiep, and Deputy Dinh Van De; Tan Dai Viet Colonels Duong Hieu Nghia (former 5th Armor Squadron Commander and now Vinh Long province chief), Huynh Van Ton (former CO 7th Division and member of an unsuccessful 1967 TDV Senate slate), and Nham Minh Trang (former Gia Dinh province chief and Second Deputy Secretary General of the PNM);* several other members of the Progressive Nationalist Movement, including Tran Van Chieu (Vice Presidential running mate on Truong Dinh Dzu's 1967 presidential ticket which received TDV support); and various individual personages such as former Information Minister Ton That Thien and Vo Van Hai, private secretary to the late President Ngo Dinh Diem. Among Minh's circle of cronies, Don also identified former General Mai Huu Xuan and former Vice President Nguyen Ngoc Tho as members of the General's campaign staff. Don added that Tho is probably now serving as the general coordinator of Minh's campaign organization. Don also emphatically denied that General Le Van Kim, one of Minh's closest collaborators in the past, is working with Minh's staff.

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* Footnote: All three officers reportedly were prime movers in General Khanh's January 1964 coup against Big Minh and in subsequent anti-Khanh coups of September, 1964 and February, 1965.

8. Don also stated that he is uncertain whether General Minh in fact can muster the requisite number of presidential endorsements in the event that the Lower House reinstates its version of the presidential election bill. In this regard Don recalled that during a visit to Minh's presidential campaign staff several weeks ago he had noted that Minh's aides were then drafting a list of potential national assembly endorsements for Minh's candidacy. Their list he noted had fallen slightly short of the requisite 40 introductions from Senators and Lower House Deputies.

9. Don disclosed that General Minh and President Thieu have their own private channels of communications which are readily accessible in the event of urgent need. According to Don the channel consists of various staff officers in Minh's and Thieu's offices who have at one time or another served with both individuals and who maintain communication with them.

10. Ky's Candidacy. General Don confirmed earlier speculation that, based on his remarks to the National Salvation Front on May 22, he in fact feels himself closer to Vice President Ky than to either President Thieu or General Minh. "If conscience and friendship were my guide then I would support Ky" he stated. However, Don emphatically denied that he is now in fact supporting the Vice President. Although he believes that Ky does not "have a chance" against Thieu in the forthcoming presidential election, he did not exclude the possibility that Ky would be able to gain a sufficient number of National Assembly endorsements in order to qualify as a presidential candidate in the event that the Lower House reinstates the endorsement provision of the presidential election bill. In the event that Ky is unable to qualify as a presidential candidate, Don speculated that the chances would increase for a Minh-Ky ticket -- a development which, he noted, would not be advantageous to his own personal position.

11. Reconciliation Efforts. Don confirmed that he is presently engaged in an effort to arrange a compromise between Vice President Ky and General Big Minh and in this regard noted that Minh and Ky have recently been playing tennis together. Don also said that he has not given up hopes of an eventual reconciliation between President Thieu and General Minh. Accordingly he still believes that a Thieu-Minh compromise is still possible but acknowledged that it is now improbable.

12. Lower House Elections. Don stated that for him personally the Lower House elections are now more important than the presidential election. Asked to comment upon his rumored candidacy for a Lower

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House seat, Don stated that he has not yet decided whether or not to run. However Don recalled his efforts to assemble an alliance of other Lower House candidates which he hopes will form an independent majority bloc in the National Assembly following the August elections. Stating that his objective is a Lower House bloc of 80 independent Deputies, Don said that he has been encouraged by his recent extensive trips to the countryside to promote this project but he avoided being drawn out further on its details.

13. The National Salvation Front. Discussing the present status of his own party, the National Salvation Front, Don stated that he is presently seeking a total of at least 100 cadre to represent his group in each of the provinces. However, Don added that this project would require at least one million piasters per month in cadre salaries and stated that this kind of money is not available. Implying that the NSF remains a minor political grouping, Don acknowledged that amongst the leadership of the party the only person to travel, spend money and work hard on the party's behalf is himself. Commenting on the NSF's recent national convention, Don confirmed that approximately 270 party members had attended the party meeting and that the entire affair had cost the party about 700,000 piasters. Don continued that the central leadership of the NSF is presently divided into three branches, one pro-Minh (Lady Senator Nguyen Phuoc Dai and Senator Hong Son Dong), a pro-Ky group (Le Van Thai and Senator Thai Lang Nghiem) and a third element which supports Don himself. Don added that his recent speech to the NSF had surprised many members but that he did not believe it would lead to a formal split within the party. However, Don continued, about 70 members of the NSF had met with General Big Minh following Don's speech despite their chairman's own declaration of neutrality.

14. Front to Protect Democracy. Asked to comment upon a speech which he made in February proposing a "Front to Protect Democracy" Don stated that this project has now apparently failed. He recalled that he had proposed the front in order to provide an organization for an alliance of various political parties, groups and individuals whose common interest is to assure the honesty of the forthcoming elections. He commented sourly that even radical feminist and political militant Mme. Ngo Ba Thanh has refused to join this effort.

15. Comment: Don's statement that several prominent Tan Dai Viets and members of the Progressive Nationalist Movement have now joined Minh's

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staff is interesting in light of our earlier assessment that based on discussions with PNM leader Nguyen Van Bong the Cap Tien appears to be leaning towards support for President Thieu.

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